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CONCERNING A FORM OF DEGENERACY.

II.

THE EDUCATION AND CARE OF THE FEEBLE-MINDED.

THE history of the education of the feeble-minded begins with the present century.¹ The early recorded cases were in connection with schools for deaf-mutes, the first being a single case in Paris, France, in 1800. Later several cases are reported in Hartford, Conn., about 1818, and in Paris from 1828 to 1833. The true method of education for this class of defectives had not been found, and the early attempts were not successful enough to justify continuance.

In 1837 the apostle to the idiot appeared in the person of Dr. Edouard Seguin, who began a work in Paris which continued until he came to America eleven years later, and opened the first school for idiots in New York. In 1842 a school for cretins was established in Switzerland, and one for idiots in Berlin. The first school in England began in 1846. It was private, but was soon followed by fine public institutions.

Dr. Seguin's efforts met with such remarkable success that his method was plainly indicated as the correct one. His *Treatise on Idiocy*, published in 1846, continues to be the textbook of the profession. The book was specially attractive to advanced educators and to alienists. The physiological method of education which Dr. Seguin taught has had a profound effect, not only on the methods of training defectives, but on the science of education in general.

Public attention to the needs of the idiot began in New York and Massachusetts in 1845, in which year superintendents of hospitals for insane in both states made the necessity of some action in the matter a part of their public reports. The next

¹ See "The History of the Treatment of the Feeble-minded," by WALTER C. FERNALD, M.D., in proceedings of the Twentieth National Conference of Charities and Correction, Chicago, 1893.

year, 1846, the legislatures of both these states began consideration of the question. In 1848 the General Court of Massachusetts made its first appropriation for an experimental school in connection with the Institution for the Blind. This was begun in October, 1848. A few months earlier in the same year, and almost simultaneously with Dr. Seguin's school in New York, the first private school for the feeble-minded in America was opened at Barre, Mass.

Agitation of the question was kept up in New York until, in 1851, an appropriation was made by the legislature, and in October of that year an experimental school near Albany commenced a work for the state of New York which has resulted in the present splendid training school at Syracuse, and the three custodial asylums for adult idiots and imbeciles in other parts of the state.

In Pennsylvania a private school at Germantown, organized in 1852 by Mr. J. B. Richards, who was the first teacher of the Boston school, developed the next year into an incorporated institution, supported partly by private subscriptions and partly by public funds. Removed, two years later, to a site near Medea, Pa., the school has grown into the present beautiful institution village of Elwyn, with more than a thousand inhabitants, including those of all grades of idiocy and imbecility.

The institution in Ohio was established in 1857, and the state, which is famous for its liberality to its benevolent institutions, has not been niggardly to the feeble-minded.

Schools were established in Connecticut in 1858; Kentucky, 1860; Illinois, 1865. Other states soon followed the example of their more progressive sisters, and there are at present in the United States twenty-four institutions supported wholly or in greater part by public funds, and about nine private institutions of a similar kind supported by tuition payments.¹

In four institutions which were organized for the custodial care of adult idiots, and in, perhaps, three of the more recent of

¹ For recent statistics see "Care of the Feeble-minded," by F. M. POWELL, M.D., in the proceedings of the Twenty-fourth National Conference of Charities and Correction, Toronto, 1897.

the general state institutions, permanent or asylum care has been the main purpose from their inception. In these the education of the feeble-minded has been understood to mean education for life in the institution. All the other institutions were established in the hope of training the feeble-minded, as most deaf-mutes and many of the blind may be trained, so as to fit them for self-directing activity in the common walks of life.

The early teachers of the feeble-minded jealously guarded their schools from the danger of becoming asylums. Admission was restricted to those classed as improvables, which term meant such as it was thought could be graduated from the school with a mental equipment equal to or not much below that of the average citizen. Epileptics and the so-called custodial cases were refused admission. The school for the feeble-minded was held to be "a link in the chain of common schools—the last, indeed, but still a necessary link in order to embrace all the children of the state." "The institution, being intended for a school, should not be converted into a hospital for incurables."¹ "The training of the feeble-minded does not belong to therapeutics. It is an educational work, governed by psychology and physiology, the former reached through and founded on the latter."

Notwithstanding such strong statements as those quoted above, the fact that the early superintendents were nearly all physicians gave undue emphasis to the medical side of the work, and helped to confuse that easily muddled thing, the public mind, which, in this country at least, associates with the word "doctor" the work of healing, not of educating. Even to the present day, many persons whose positions and general knowledge ought to make them qualified to pronounce a trustworthy opinion, imagine that the possession of a diploma of medicine is a prerequisite to the proper executive and educational management of a training school for the feeble-minded, while they would not dream of requiring such a qualification, in addition to educational and executive ability, from the superintendent of a school for the deaf or blind.

¹ Dr. Howe, Massachusetts, in early reports of the school.

The early institutions began in a small and tentative way, and with much public criticism and suspicion. Their promoters hoped to win favor by success, which should be demonstrated by graduating their pupils fit for the activities and responsibilities of citizenship. For many years it was not assumed that, in any cases, the institution care should be permanent. Inmates were not (and still in most states are not) *committed* to the institution, but were *admitted* under certain rules as to age, residence, etc., much as they are to the common schools. It was long the belief of the managers (as it is today contended by the proprietors of some small private institutions) that, to achieve good results, the number in any one school should be very small. An inevitable and striking result of this theory was a ratio of cost so high that only remarkable results in the improvement of the pupils could justify its being defrayed from public funds.¹

As the years went by, pupils, admitted as children, reached the age limit of the institutions, and were discharged from their watchful and kindly care. Among these, instances became known of imbeciles who, having been under training for years and having greatly improved, were returned to their old wretched surroundings, where they speedily lapsed to their former degraded condition, made all the worse for them by the contrast with their cleanly and orderly life in the institution. Others of a higher grade, discharged as capable of self-support, missing the gentle but firm control to which they had been accustomed, showed traits of character that had seemed eradicated, wandered off and became criminals, tramps, or drunkards. Others settled down to ordinary life, but seized the first opportunity to marry. Some of these became paupers, their children inheriting their defective traits. In every institution there began to be an accumulation of inmates at or past the legal age limit, who yet were so manifestly unfit for self-control that the managers felt it a wrong both to them and to the community to dismiss them.

¹ The ratio of expense is still excessive in many institutions. This fact, next to public ignorance and indifference, is the greatest obstacle in the way of that complete provision by the state for all the feeble-minded which is the necessary first step toward diminishing their number.

Such facts as the above, the apparent constant increase of the defective classes, and the attention so largely given to social problems by educated people, have radically changed the theories of the leaders in the care of the defectives. Slowly but surely the conviction has become general, especially among the trustees and officers of institutions, that admission as a pupil of the training school should be but the first step to permanent care; that, with a few exceptions, so few that they may be disregarded in establishing a policy, all the pupils of the school, from the lowest to the highest grade, ought to be permanently retained in the safe, kindly, maternal care of the state. The above conviction is now held by all who have expressed themselves publicly within the last few years in this country, excepting a few persons whose pecuniary interests seem in conflict with such a theory. It has been acted upon by the legislatures of many states, whose laws have been changed by removing from the institution code the age limit of retention, and in some cases of acceptance. In at least one western state the doors of the institution have been opened so wide as to admit an imbecile mother with a large family of idiotic children. Other states have provided separate custodial asylums, especially for adult females. While it is generally accepted that the imbeciles of all classes should be segregated, the special importance of not only admitting, but of committing and retaining in permanent care, all idiotic women of child-bearing age is appreciated by every intelligent person as soon as the proposition is made in his hearing. In the annual reports of institutions this principle is often mentioned as the improvement in law and practice that is now most necessary. A belief in the necessity of permanent care for all this defective class is professed by the superintendent of every state school for the feeble-minded in the United States today.

It is a startling fact, and one that needs explanation, that the present special public provision, in the United States, for the feeble-minded is only sufficient for about 10 per cent. of the whole number. This is in marked contrast with the provision for the insane, which in most states is rapidly approaching adequacy for all, both acute and chronic cases, and in the whole

country is probably within 25 per cent. of being adequate. And yet, if the facts set forth in the former paper are actual, the idiotic present a more serious menace to the commonwealth than do the insane. The cause of this anomalous condition is not hard to find. The average citizen is afraid of the insane. A few among them are so dangerous that the whole class is feared. People knowing an insane man to be at large in the streets would dread personal violence. The dangers from the idiotic are less obvious. The evils that they cause are chiefly economic evils. True, there are some thieves, fire-bugs, rapists, and murderers among them, but these are the small minority. So the average citizen looks upon the feeble-minded with contempt or indifference, and is careless whether they are cared for by the state, at a high standard of care and cost, and with almost perfect protection to themselves and the community; or by the town or county, at a low standard of care and cost, and with little or no protection; or whether they have no care and no protection, and therefore cause no public cost which is apparent at the first glance. The average citizen only sees things that are very prominent, and only dreads consequences that are immediate. The man of large means, whose annual tax bill is a heavy one, looks with much questioning upon public expenditures for measures of prevention. He feels the cost at once; the advantages, to be gained in a few years or, perhaps, in the next generation, he does not appreciate. The members of our legislatures are mostly ordinary citizens, upon whom receiving the majority of the votes cast in their district has conferred no genius for statesmanship; they must be chiefly reached through their feelings. They are willing to relieve the distress and suffering of the poor, neglected idiot, when it is made clear to them; but few of them entertain the statesmanlike view of averting dreadful, remote consequences, by action involving immediate and, perhaps, unpopular appropriations.

In other words, let us say, the public conscience is not yet awake to the claims of the feeble-minded. The dangers they threaten are not known, their distress is not understood or felt by citizens at large. It is part of the purpose of this essay to help awaken a public interest that is so sorely needed.

It has been intimated above that the early hopes of the first promoters of the training of the feeble-minded were not realized. It has not been found practicable to discharge large numbers of the educated imbeciles to care for themselves and direct their own course of life. But it by no means follows that it is not possible to train large numbers of them so that they may earn their own livelihood. It is necessary here carefully to discriminate between self-support and self-direction. The fact is that, given the right training, followed by favorable opportunity under wise and kindly guardianship, large numbers of the feeble-minded may be rendered entirely self-supporting. Another large proportion may be taught to do some work. Only a small minority is incapable of any useful labor.

The proportion of the feeble-minded who may be made to earn their own living, under control, is variously estimated. The superintendents of at least two of the large training schools, both men of practical common sense, place the estimate as high as 50 per cent. of the whole number admitted. It is instructive to notice that estimates of this kind tend to become larger, especially as made by the managers of institutions which have a large acreage of farming and fruit-growing lands.

In considering such estimates as the foregoing, we must remember that an able-bodied laborer, with steady employment, can provide for himself, a wife, and several children; the product of his labor should be equal, at least, to the support of three adults. If, therefore, an imbecile laborer perform one-third of a man's full work, or just as much more than that as will pay for the extra supervision required because he is feeble-minded, he is entitled to be classed as self-supporting.

It is possible that the time may come when there will be so large a number of adult imbeciles, gathered into the institutions, who have received all the advantages that the training school can give them, that it may be difficult to provide them with profitable labor. But that time appears to be far distant in most places of the kind. Few or none of them are yet doing all that they believe to be possible of the work of the institution, by the labor of their trained inmates. Farming, gardening, laundering,

cooking, the domestic work of the house, the manufacture of clothing and shoes, carpentering, road-making and grading, lumbering, quarrying, brick-making, building, the care of the lower-grade and the younger inmates—these and kindred occupations absorb, as yet, all the available trained labor, and, in fact, there is not nearly as much of such labor available, in most institutions as now organized, as could be profitably utilized.

The education given in the schools is usually of a very practical nature. For many of the pupils it begins with the simplest habits of life; it goes on through the kindergarten, the primary school, and manual training of all kinds, until it ends in the workshop, the farm, or the domestic department. Since the general acceptance of the theory of permanent care the training school has taken on a new meaning. Just as the normal child is, or should be, trained in the common school for the duties and responsibilities of citizenship in the great world, so the abnormal or feeble-minded child is trained in this special school for the duties and the pleasures of life in the little world to which he belongs. The training involves the whole being to a much greater extent than does that of the common school. The physical, mental, and emotional natures must be cultured simultaneously. The base of the educative work is physiological. The education is by doing. Dormant capacities must be awakened. Weak faculties of all kinds, not only the mental faculties of memory, judgment, and will, but sight, smell and taste, hearing and feeling, must be developed and strengthened by systematic exercise.

The institution inmates are usually divided into educables, industrials, and custodials. The two former differ chiefly in age, and the classes grade into each other as the child grows into the stature of the man. The custodial class includes all who are not susceptible of the higher training. These again are divided from the others by grades that are sometimes almost imperceptible. Being natural divisions, they have no hard and fast lines between them, and inmates classed as custodials often improve until they are fit for transfer to a higher grade.

What has been said above plainly indicates the future of the

work of caring for the feeble-minded, at least for many years to come. The institutions can take these undesirable and hurtful citizens and make of them, or of many of them, self-supporting members of a separate community, and at the same time avert the dangers of reproduction and increase. In this work the training school is the nucleus; around it, and subsidiary to it, the whole institution should cluster.

It is true that the cost of these schools has been great in the past, and when we consider the number to be provided for—at least ten times as many as are now in the institutions—the total cost would appear prohibitory of this plan.^{*} But just as soon as it is demonstrated that a large proportion is self-supporting; that the improvable can be cared for, with decency and humanity, at a very moderate ratio of expense, by utilizing the labor of the trained higher grades; that only the younger ones, who belong to the educable grade, and a few of the lowest grade, violent and dangerous idiots, require a high per capita cost—it seems probable that the means to gather in and care for the whole class will be forthcoming. When that period arrives, the number of idiots and imbeciles in the nation will cease to increase, and, if other classes of degenerates can also be brought under control, the number may diminish very rapidly. It is too much to claim that idiocy and imbecility can be stamped out, even by the most vigorous segregation of the present generation. Sporadic cases continually occur from apparently inscrutable causes. Accident and disease will have their victims; but these are few, indeed, compared with those whose mental weakness is the result of evil heredity.

The method suggested for carrying out the theory above stated is known as the colony plan. Although not in full operation anywhere, yet beginnings have been made which have abundantly justified the expectations of their promoters. The plan in its fullness is somewhat as follows:

^{*} These considerations of cost have reference rather to present public opinion and possibility of immediate action than to the real interests of the commonwealth. It would be far cheaper to segregate the entire class of the imbeciles and idiots, were the cost five times greater than that of the most expensive training school, than to neglect them as we are now doing.

With the training school as a nucleus, the chief executive department, the hospital for the sick, the industrial building, and the departments for the very lowest custodial grades being closely connected with it, let there be attached to each institution one or more large tracts of land, in, or near, a state of nature, and containing as many of the natural opportunities of wood, stone, brick-clay, coal, etc., as possible. Especially let there be a soil that is, or may be made, highly fertile. Upon such a tract let there be erected a few simple, substantial buildings, sufficient, to begin with, for a colony of two hundred trained male imbeciles, graduates of the training school, who have been taught to labor. At least one-fourth of these should be of the brightest class of high-grade imbeciles; the remainder may be of the middle and lower grades, of whom a fair proportion may be of the custodial class. Let all the male employés be mechanics or practical farmers. Let the colonists build houses, to receive from time to time all the graduates of the training school whose labor can be spared from the mother house, and all the middle-grade non-improvable idiots who may be received by the institution after the colony begins. Let the houses be plain, substantial buildings, constructed of the available material on the land, whether that be stone quarried, or bricks made, on the premises. Along with the erection of the cottages should go the building of halls, gymnasiums, and chapels, as may be desired. Let the method of life be simple and plain, as near the normal life of the farmer and the gardener as possible. Let the lands be cleared, ditched, and brought to the highest possible state of cultivation; the grounds around the buildings adorned with shrubbery, lawns, and flower gardens. Let the whole colony become a "village of the simple," its inhabitants an industrious, celibate community, having all that other villagers enjoy, except the excitement of popular elections, and the pleasures, trials, and anxieties of married life.

Such a colony, having the mother house as its market for the produce of its farm, dairy, orchards, and gardens, could, when completed, be made to pay much of its maintenance cost by its products. The cost of its buildings and equipment, on the plan outlined, would be surprisingly low. The colony should be

allowed to increase in number until the land is fully occupied. It should include groups of able-bodied, but feeble-minded, laborers, and of lower- and middle-grade idiots, in caring for whom the higher-grade imbeciles can be usefully employed.

On a tract of one thousand acres there would be room for, perhaps, three hundred adult trained imbeciles and twice as many more of the lower grades. For many years, if the land were wisely selected, all the available labor could be usefully employed in clearing, building, fencing, draining, farming, gardening, and stock raising. If ever the crops became more than the colony and the mother house could use, a good market for the finished products—butter, cheese, canned goods, dried fruits, jams, jellies and pickles, dressed meat, bacon, hams and lard, and, possibly, clothing, shoes, brushes, etc.—could be found in the state institutions for the insane, the blind, and the deaf without invading the ordinary avenues of commerce.

In such a colony the trained imbeciles, both the higher- and the middle-grade, would be entirely self-supporting, and the burden of the others, with adequate care and protection, would be much less in first cost than that of their present neglect, or semi-neglect; while the results in economy of every kind in the future would give the state an enormous return on its investment.

No completed colony of the kind exists today, but in Ohio, Massachusetts, Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana, California, and other states beginnings have been made, and some of them have advanced far enough to demonstrate that the plan is entirely practicable. If this plan should be found successful as applied to the feeble-minded, why should it not, with modifications, apply to other classes of degenerates?

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